

Minutes of past Dodson Meetings

November 14, 2010 (Original Interview)

Mr. Peter Flinker and Mr. Nate Kelly from Dodson Associates and Horsley Witten Group came before the Board to present their proposal for the Cluster Development Bylaw Study. Mr. Flinker gave a brief presentation describing the team's approach to the proposed study and Dodson's experience in Open Space Residential Design (OSRD) and Cluster Development. Mr. Flinker stated he would investigate alternative approaches, extract the best alternatives, create design guidelines and then incorporate the vision and guidelines into a bylaw.

Mr. Flinker described similar projects he and Mr. Kelly have worked on and the success had working with residents. Mr. Flinker and Mr. Kelly described cluster development as an effective tool where no one knows where to use it. Mr. Flinker stated he could investigate incentive based provisions, Green OSRD provisions similar to those he worked on in Attleboro, historic or conservation based OSRD provisions.

Mr. McCauley asked if any portion of the proposal was of concern. Mr. Flinker stated he could work with the Board to try and navigate what the Town really wants or needs. He noted the study may find cluster regulations are not appropriate for Wellesley, and then an alternative approach could be explored.

Mr. McCauley thanked Mr. Flinker and Mr. Kelly for their response to the RFP and indicated the Board would be making a decision and notifying all of the consultants within the next week.

January 31, 2011

Mr. Peter Flinker of Dodson Associates came before the Board to begin the Cluster Development Study. Mr. Flinker stated that the Town adopted a cluster provision in 1972. The current provision allows for a 50% reduction in required area (40,000 square foot district, then requires 20,000 square feet of land) if the remaining land is set aside for open space. He described the intent of cluster development or conservation design was to set aside land for conservation purposes. He stated cluster subdivisions design with more detail to enhance smaller areas. Over the past 10 years with the growth of new urbanism, planners have looked at elements such as hedges, porches, fences, to enhance cluster designs.

Mr. Flinker stated part of the current study is look at a number of tools that can be used for cluster subdivisions, and then determine which are appropriate for Wellesley. Several large lots were selected for an academic exercise to determine what the current subdivision regulations would allow.

The North 40 located between Weston Road and Turner Road, within a SRD 15, yielded 80 lots.

The Hunnewell Estates at 845 Washington Street, with a SRD 40, yielded 25 lots.

Wellesley College-Pond Road at 165 Pond Road, within a SRD 40, yielded 67 lots.

Mass Bay College- located along Oakland Street, within a SRD 20, yielded 40 lots on the west side of Oakland, and 30 lots on the east side of Oakland.

Babson College- property located on Great Plain Avenue and Wellesley Avenue, within a SRD 30, yielded 30 lots.

The Board discussed the findings. The economics of cluster development were discussed. The Board noted the high land values make cluster development difficult. Mr. Glick noted areas could be downsized to lesser densities, but believed the passage at Town Meeting would be difficult due to land values.

The Board saw potential for good cluster projects around Lake Waban off of Pond Road. Ms. Donahue noted an age restricted 55+ development could be self-contained on site with minimal visual impact to Pond Road.

Mr. Flinker noted a mandatory cluster provision might be an option.

Mr. Flinker asked the Board to select two or three sites for further development. The Board suggested a quick cluster massing diagram be completed for each site, and then the Board would narrow down the sites for refinement.

Mr. Glick asked if there were good examples of institutional cluster projects. He questioned if a covenant could be used to limit developable areas.

Mr. Flinker stated he could outline a number of zoning alternatives at the next meeting which may be appropriate tools for Wellesley. The Board noted that smaller subdivisions are now occurring in Wellesley and asked Mr. Flinker to look at the minimum area requirements for a cluster subdivision or to seek examples of successful clusters on 2 to 3 acres of land.

The Board scheduled the next meeting with Dodson Associates for February 7, 2011.

February 7, 2011

Mr. Peter Flinker and Nate Kelly came before the Board to continue discussions on the Cluster Development Study.

Mr. Flinker gave a brief update on last week's meeting. He noted he looked at a number of sites in Town and estimated the number of lots that could be created from a standard subdivision. At the end of the last meeting, the Board asked Mr. Flinker to take a preliminary look at what cluster techniques could be used for the same sites.

The Board reviewed the Wellesley College North 40. The site could yield 80 lots at 15,000 square feet. Mr. Flinker showed an example of a cluster design which also showed 80 lots each at 5,000 square feet. The lots would have a 50' x 100' configuration which is common in cottage communities. Each lot could hold a 2,000 square foot house.

On Pond Road the initial subdivision layout yielded 67 lots. Mr. Flinker noted by avoiding areas close to the water and significant trees. 67 lots could be created at an area of 8,000 to 10,000 square feet. He noted the lots could be for single family homes, or could be for a range of densities. He envisioned the top of the knoll looking over Lake Waban as the optimal location for the development.

Mr. Flinker showed a cluster example at Hunnewell Estates. In this scenario the main house was preserved and greater density was placed on either side of the estate. He noted attached or detached structures could work at this location.

Mr. Glick asked what the public benefit was for the cluster development scenarios. Mr. Flinker used the Hunnewell Estates as an example and noted a traditional subdivision could impinge on the historic character of the house and the site. Cluster development allows for the preservation of roads and the ability to preserve existing view corridors.

Ms. Wasser stated the preservation of open space is a public benefit.

Mr. Flinker agreed and noted cluster developments work better for stormwater infiltration and allow for the preservation of trees.

Mr. McCauley asked if the open space created in a cluster development is public or private space.

Mr. Flinker noted the bylaw would have the capability to outline whether the open space preserved would be required to be public space.

The Board looked at the Mass Bay Community College Site. In this layout Mr. Flinker created a loop to connect to existing development and created buffers to the wetlands. The lots could have an area of 5,000 to 10,000 square feet with a southeast exposure. The area could hold 40-70 units depending on the transfer of some of the development rights from the land owned by Mass Bay on the east of Oakland Street.

Mr. Flinker showed the Board the comparison of 70 house units at 20,000 square feet a lot versus 70 housing units at 5,000 square feet a lot.

Mr. Flinker noted cluster development changes single family lots with a driveway to a residential village with porches and sidewalks.

Mr. Synnott asked if mixed use cluster developments worked. Mr. Flinker noted the density in these developments typically cannot support a small grocery store or retail alone. Mr. Synnott noted many grocery stores are downsizing.

Mr. Flinker noted cluster developments add recreational facilities. He stated the Town could require that 50% of the total area be protected.

Mr. Flinker indicated the majority of the large land owners in Town are institutions and the Town may want to discuss the institutions long term goals.

Mr. Flinker stated the public workshop will want to show what development could look like with appropriate design. The idea is to showcase design benefits of cluster development. He noted he could generate 1-3 site designs. As the number of sites increases, the amount of detail on the designs falls off.

Ms. Wasser asked what minimum acreage should be used.

Mr. McCauley noted the Board has seen some smaller parcels come up for subdivision recently. He suggested looking at the core of Town with a tighter cluster development. Mr. McCauley questioned if the bylaw could encompass both large and small lots.

Mr. Kelly stated the minimum acreage could be as small as 1 acre.

The Board noted although the review is an academic exercise, residents may be concerned the design would be constructed.

Mr. McCauley recommended looking at the North 40. He noted it is an obvious site and would be the least alarming to abutters.

Mr. Glick asked if incentives must be used in cluster development. Mr. Kelly stated the process becomes a special permit process and cluster development's cost for infrastructure and construction are less than a typical subdivision.

Mr. Glick was concerned that the land values in Wellesley are so high that the incremental roadway costs would not be a great enough deterrent.

Mr. Kelly stated a new type of cluster development is being created called NRC- Natural Resource Conservation cluster which creates preservation zones for different types of farmland and environmentally sensitive areas. Mr. Kelly stated Joel Russell and Bob Ritchie have been drafting this concept and have created a white paper. Mr. Kelly stated he would pass that on to the Board for their review.

Mr. Glick noted mandatory cluster with connectivity and good site design is what is needed. Mr. Kelly stated the Board can create that with the proper value system articulated in the bylaw.

Mr. Glick asked if the consultants could give the Board tools to accomplish cluster development with fewer units than the yield plan. Mr. Kelly stated the yield can be formulaic. It could exclude areas within wetlands and could exclude slopes over a specific %, but it may not significantly reduce the yield.

The Board decided on two properties, the North 40 and 169 Grove Street prior to the subdivision and construction of 4 lots.

May 23, 2011

Mr. Peter Flinker, Dodson Associates, returned to the Board for continued review of the Cluster Study. Mr. Flinker gave an overview of the build out plans for the several large sites the Board had reviewed in the past including Wellesley College land along Pond Road and the North 40 along Weston Road, Mass Bay Community College land along Oakland Street, Babson College along Great Plain Avenue and Wellesley Avenue.

Mr. Flinker noted at the last meeting the Board selected two lots to do further research and design. The two lots selected were the North 40 and a 4 lot subdivision located at 169 Grove Street.

The North 40 Design included 5000 square foot lots 50' x 100' with buffers along the aqueduct.

Mr. Glick asked in typical cluster developments who would own and be responsible for the open space provided. Mr. Flinker stated there are options. It could be the Town, a conservation organization, or the homeowners association.

Mr. Glick stated the goal of the cluster development is to preserve open space. Mr. Glick was curious what the costs would be to the Town or a Homeowners Association.

Mr. Synnott noted there is conservation and economics, and the value of land in Wellesley limits the applicability of cluster development.

Mr. Glick asked how we could reduce density, and noted he was in favor of the Natural Resource Zoning that Mr. Nate Kelly had mentioned at a previous meeting.

Mr. McCauley asked if the intent is to use cluster development to reduce density or is it a tool to reduce the destruction of environmentally sensitive areas. Mr. McCauley asked what the weaknesses to using cluster development in Wellesley are, and how could we incentivize it.

Ms. Jop noted that currently any subdivision over 5 lots would trigger inclusionary zoning, she suggested removing the inclusionary zoning for cluster development on the basis that homes on small lots would be generally more affordable.

The Board noted the public forum input will be very valuable in trying to determine whether this is a tool Wellesley wants or needs.

The Board discussed when the public forum should be held. Mr. McCauley recommended the forum be held in September.

The Board discussed who would be invited to the forum, and the goals of the study.

Ms. Wasser stated it could be helpful to have a financial comparison between the by right construction and a special permit cluster house. Ms. Wasser also questioned how the character of a cluster development might fit within specific neighborhoods in Wellesley.

The Board noted over the summer, the Staff could meet with institutions to get their feedback on the provisions. The Board asked Mr. Flinker to prepare a draft bylaw with mandatory cluster development.

Mr. Parsons noted it would be helpful to also show some examples of well done cluster developments. Mr. Flinker indicated there are several good examples including Belmont and Exeter, Rhode Island.

October 3, 2011

Discussion

Mr. Peter Flinker, of Dodson Associates, returned to the Board to continue to discuss Cluster Development and to discuss the Cluster Development Forum. Mr. Flinker gave a brief presentation reviewing the various sites used to depict how cluster development could be implemented in Wellesley.

Mr. McCauley stated he would like the Natural Resource Protection Zoning (NRPZ) considered as part of the proposed zoning in respect to the Wellesley parcels depicted.

At previous meeting, the Board discussed which parcels would be the focus of the public forum. The Board decided to focus on the North 40 (located along Weston Road between the MBTA tracks ,Turner Road and the Cochituate Aqueduct) and the 169 Grove Street development. Mr. Flinker reminded the Board that the North 40 could yield 80 house lots. In preparing a cluster design, the lots proposed were 5,000 square feet, and the design preserved the woodland features of the site and the community gardens along Weston Road. The 169 Grove parcels did not change the yield of 4 lots, however reconfigured the lots and houses to preserve the trees along Benvenue Street and access to the Sudbury Aqueduct. The 169 Grove cluster design also used the existing driveway for the Friends Meeting House to accommodate the access for 3 of the 4 house lots.

Mr. Flinker presented a third design of Babson Colleges Woodlands. The Woodland area is currently used for graduate housing. Mr. Flinker presented a conceptual village housing scheme in a loop road around the existing housing.

Mr. Flinker presented several images of successful cluster designs such as Warwick Grove, New York including specific design elements such as shared driveways, hidden parking in the rear accessed by alleys, porches, and ways to create small areas of private yard space.

The Board asked how the individual homeowners would pay for maintenance of the shared spaces. Mr. Flinker stated one way is to establish a homeowners or condominium association.

Mr. Flinker showed several images of bad cluster design. He noted bad cluster design typically resembles a fried egg with open space in the middle and on the periphery.

Mr. Flinker showed images of Donovan's Farm in Norwell. This particular cluster development was created with a public/private partnership. More than 50% of the open space was preserved. The design incorporates conservation land in the back and includes shared common space in the center with a network of pedestrian paths. Mr. Flinker noted hedges and fences are used in this development to separate the private spaces and to distinguish each lot from the neighbors. Mr. Flinker noted in this development the home size is quite large with each dwelling measuring approximately 3,000 square feet.

Mr. Flinker showed several other examples of successful cluster designs including the redevelopment of a former YMCA camp in Charlestown, Rhode Island, Danielson Grove, Seattle, and Medfield, Massachusetts.

After the presentation the Board discussed what they would like to incorporate into the public forum. Mr. Glick asked who the forum should be for. The Board discussed inviting builders, other Town boards and committees, and the colleges.

Ms. Wasser suggested a good publicity campaign to try and gather different interest groups. She agreed that the college stakeholders should be involved.

Mr. Synnott noted the economics of a cluster development in Wellesley are different than in other communities. He asked if there was a way to model the economics of a proposed cluster.

Mr. McCauley stated he was curious how small lots and the single family model in Wellesley could be integrated. He noted it will be good to get the reactions of residents to alternative design models. Mr. McCauley noted the existing cluster zoning has not worked, and noted the presentation should discuss perhaps why the existing model is not appropriate.

The Board discussed the presentation for the forum. The Board discussed possibly doing a morning meeting for the colleges. The Board discussed if there were a way to conduct a virtual presentation. The Board indicated a brief presentation outlining what cluster development is and looks like would be helpful to open the meeting.

The Board discussed the NRPZ. Mr. Zehner noted NRPZ does not always reduce the amount of usable acreage on a site. The Board noted the forum should discuss if the use of cluster should be mandatory or whether there should be incentives for the use of cluster design techniques.

The Board set the date of the public forum for December 5, 2011.